

Point of Rocks Stage Station
22 miles northeast of Rock Springs, 1/2 mile
south of Interstate 80
Point of Rocks Vicinity
Sweetwater County
Wyoming

HABS No. WYO-69

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WYO,

19-PTROC.V,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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POINT OF ROCKS STAGE STATION

Location: 22 miles northeast of Rock Springs, Wyoming; 1/2 mile south of Interstate 80, near Point of Rocks, Sweetwater County, Wyoming.
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: (USGS Point of Rocks Quadrangle Map) 12.683880.4616020.

Present Owner: The State of Wyoming, administered by the Wyoming Recreation Commission.

Present Use: Historic Site.

Statement of Significance: The Point of Rocks Stage Station is one of the very few remains of the celebrated Overland Stage Route. Operated by Ben Holladay, the Overland Stage Company contributed to the settlement and development of the West. Point of Rocks was an important junction for the Overland Stage and later the Union Pacific Railroad and the South Pass Stage Line, which served the Sweetwater Mines.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1861-2 (Trevor, p. 97).
2. Architect: None known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a complete chain of title to the southwest quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 27, Township 20 North, Range 101 West describing the land upon which the buildings are located, taken from the records of the clerk of the County Courthouse, Green River, Wyoming:

1899 Deed May 19, 1899
 April L, Page 447
 S. E. Day, et al
 to
 The Union Pacific Railroad
 (Entire Section)

1902 Patent
December 20, 1908, Recorded March 10, 1902
Book A, Page 138
The United States of America
to
The Union Pacific Railroad
(Entire Section)

Quit Claim Deed
February 5, 1947, Recorded February 13, 1947
Book 148, Page 271
The Union Pacific Railroad
to
The State of Wyoming
(1 acre in SW 1/4 of SW 1/4)

4. Original plans and construction, alterations:

There is little documentary or photographic evidence on this stage station. It was necessary, therefore, to rely upon a visual inspection of the structure in order to estimate its date of construction. Parts of the structure are deteriorated--it burned at least once--and walls which are whole are located at points where additions or alterations might be expected to occur. The walls are sufficiently continuous and of homogeneous appearance that it is safe to assume that the present outlines of the building conform to the original.

The dimensions of the building, beginning at the northwest corner, are: proceeding south 50'-4" along the west wall to the southwest corner; the south wall is almost entirely deteriorated and measures 35'-3"; the first portion of the east wall is 19'-2", it then turns ninety degrees west to form the first segment of the north wall which runs 16' before turning ninety degrees to the north; at this point there is a 12' gap before the wall resumes and proceeds 19'-2" to the northeast corner; the north wall is 18'-5" and closes the circuit at the northwest corner.

The south exterior wall is almost entirely gone, but enough remains at the foundation level to indicate that it abutted no other walls than the existing ones. There appear to have been no additions as a time lag in the construction of any part of the structure would have exposed the northwest, southwest, and southeast rooms to the elements. The south wall probably had two windows to light its two rooms.

There is a gap in the east wall between the northwest and the southwest rooms. This gap apparently was open originally but was filled in with a frame wall when the structure became a residence. Traces of this frame are still visible on the east wall. Also on the east wall there is a low wall of the same stone as the rest of the building. It extends out from the northerly wall for a few feet, but in line with the water-table in plan rather than as a continuation of the building wall. It is no more than two or three feet in height on the interior. There are no signs that this was ever any larger, and may represent an abortive attempt on the part of residents to close up the wall in local stone.

There is a gap on the north exterior wall of the southeast room which once contained a window and a door. The station suffered at least one fire, and in consequence it is unlikely that much of the timber work is original, especially the roof. The present wood and metal roof is built partially with telegraph poles. The most likely original roof would have been one which resembled the present one structurally; i.e. of long beam timbers on the stone walls with short purlins perpendicular to these, and smaller slats laid across the purlins. These would have been covered with sod. This was the normal roof for a stage station.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The Point of Rocks Stage Station was built about 1861 or 1862 as a southern stop on the Overland Stage Line. Accessibility to springs made the site a traditional watering place for Indians and hunters.

During the early years of the Civil War the Federal Government allowed military strength in the West to decline to such an extent that transportation routes and communications lines were in constant jeopardy from Indian raids. Stages carrying the United States mail along the Oregon and California trails were completely interdicted by Indian depredations. Ben Holladay, proprietor of the Overland Stage Line which carried the mails, appealed to the Federal Government for help and decided to move the hardest hit section of the route south to avoid further disruptions. Among the stations constructed along the new southern route was the station at Point of Rocks. This station was 1,009 miles west of Atchison, Kansas and 904 miles east of Placerville, California, the two terminals of the Overland Stage operation.

Throughout the Civil War years the region around Point of Rocks continued to be the scene of considerable Indian activity. Point of Rocks station was burned out at least once. According to one account, the station was also the scene of a robbery staged by a "Jim Slade, ex-stage line superintendent, turned bandit." Seven passengers on the coach were reportedly killed in the holdup.

In 1868 the Union Pacific Railroad was built through the area and Point of Rocks became a junction between the Overland Trail and the railroad. During the same year, 1868, gold was discovered in the vicinity of South Pass. For several years following this discovery Point of Rocks Stage Station was the starting terminal for the stage and freight operations serving South Pass City (WYO-27) and the Sweetwater Mines. In 1870 there were two daily runs between Point of Rocks and the mines at South Pass City and Atlantic City (WYO-60). The trip took under fifteen hours and was considered to be a good deal more comfortable and convenient than the desert trip on the Union Pacific Railroad.

By 1877 the Sweetwater mines were no longer producing enough to make stage and freight operations profitable. The station buildings at Point of Rocks then became the residence of the Taggart family. Mrs. Taggart turned part of the structure into a school room and held classes there for the children of the small town just across the railroad tracks. The Taggarts' daughter, Mrs. Charles Rador, lived there with her husband, a sheep rancher, until 1910. According to local legend, Butch Cassidy sought the protection of the Rador's station following the Tipton Train Robbery.

The last resident of the station was Jim McKee, thought to be a member of the "Hole in the Wall" gang. McKee spent much of his time searching the area for a cache of loot reportedly buried by Cassidy some years earlier. The Union Pacific attempted to evict McKee during the 1930s, but he threatened their representative with bodily harm and the company decided to leave him alone. Thereafter McKee kept a smallpox warning on his door to discourage visitors.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

_____, "Point of Rocks," research folder in the files of the Wyoming Recreation Commission, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

_____, United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management, Antiquities Site Inventory, Rock Springs District, Site number HS49-04-3, Point of Rocks Stage Station.

Lund, John, Point of Rocks Stage Station Preservation, Plan I, Prepared for the Wyoming Recreation Commission, June, 1971, available at the Wyoming Recreation Commission, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Wyoming Recreation Commission. National Register Nomination, accepted January 5, 1970.

b. Secondary and published sources:

_____, Annals of Wyoming, The Official Publication of the Wyoming State Historical Society, "Overland Stage Trail-Trek Number 2," vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 194-214.

_____, Annals of Wyoming, "Overland Stage Trail-Trek Number 3," vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 235-249.

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Larson, T. A., History of Wyoming, 1965, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

Moody, Ralph, Stagecoach West, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1967.

Root, Frank A., The Overland Stage to California, 1901, W. Y. Morgan, Topeka.

Trevor, Marjorie, History of Carter-Sweetwater County, Wyoming, Master's Thesis, University of Wyoming, Laramie.

Prepared by John Hnedak
Project Historian
National Park Service
Summer 1974

and Candace Reed
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
January 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a typical example of the small stage stations that were built along the Overland Trail during the late nineteenth century.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor, some walls deteriorated and part of roof missing. Restored during late summer and early fall of 1974 by Wyoming Recreation Commission.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: L-shape, 19'-2" (1 bay) 35'-3" (2 bays); wing 18'-5" (1 bay) x 31'-2"; 1 story.
2. Foundations: Rubble stone.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Load-bearing walls; uncoursed light tan native sandstone laid up without mortar. Joints are chinked with mud mortar. Large grey stones used as corner quoins.
4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing stone walls and partitions with log beams.
5. Chimney: Located on the east facade.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are wooden frames with hewn lintels mortised into the openings. No doors exist.

- b. Windows and shutters: Window frames are wooden with hewn lintels mortised into the stone. No windows survive except a two-light sash, hinged, without glass in the northwest room.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is a very shallow slope gable with some tin roofing on portions of the roof and other portions with only wooden decking remaining. It probably had a sod roof originally.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Eaves are exposed roof boards with log beams overhanging at the gable ends.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plan: The entrance to the stage station is through the covered porch on the east facade. Entering the porch to the right is the northwest room which was probably the stage office. To the left of the porch is the southwest room and, at right angles to the porch wing, is the southeast room. The southwest and southeast rooms were probably living quarters. The southeast room has a fireplace on the east wall with an arched lintel over the opening. A portion of the firebox has been filled in with stone. On the floor near the fireplace a large wooden block is embedded in the earth. It was probably a chopping block. A door on the north wall of this room leads outside.
- 2. Flooring: Wooden log sleepers support wooden plank flooring in the northwest room. The southwest and southeast rooms have dirt floors.
- 3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls in all rooms and the covered porch are stone with some fragments of mud plaster on some walls which have been plastered. Ceilings are exposed log beams and wooden decking.
- 4. Doorways and doors: There are large hewn wooden lintels mortised into the walls over door openings and wooden frames. Frames are missing on two doors. No doors remain, but all appear to have been single.

5. Mechanical equipment: The fireplace in the southeast room is the only existing means of heating. There are two round openings in the northwest room and the covered porch which suggest that there were once flues through the roof.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The site of Point of Rocks is located in a valley of the Bitter Creek, an alkaline stream that runs just to the northeast of the station, is across a dirt road. The dirt road leads off Interstate 80 and provides access to the site. The station faces east at the base of a perpendicular outcropping of sandstone. The terrain surrounding the site is heavily covered with dense sagebrush.
2. Outbuildings: A stable (WYO-69a) is located to the southeast of the station. A few hundred yards to the west was a small cemetery with one small enclosure remaining.

Prepared by John P. White
Project Supervisor
National Park Service
Summer 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the State of Wyoming through the Wyoming Recreation Commission and was financed with funds provided by the Wyoming State Legislature. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey, the project was completed during the summer of 1974 at the Historic American Buildings Survey Field Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming by John P. White, Project Supervisor (Professor, Texas Tech University), John D. Hnedak, Project Historian (Cornell University). Student Assistant Architects who prepared the measured drawings for the project were Thomas L. Amis, Jr. (University of Texas, Austin), Stephen O. Fildes (Texas Tech University), John T. Reddick (Yale University), and Paul S. Wheeler (University of Idaho). Photographs were taken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer. This report was edited for HABS in 1977 by Candace Reed.